

General Comments on Revelation 8

Chapter 8 picks up chronologically from the end of ch. 6. In ch. 6 we had the first six of the seven seals, ch. 7 is an interlude, and ch. 8 opens with the seventh seal.

Overall, the underlying theme is the purging of the earth in preparation for the marriage supper of the Lamb (cp. ch. 19), which is the commencement of the Millennium. This is stated in D&C 77:12, "the sounding of the trumpets of the seven angels are the preparing and finishing of his work, in the beginning of the seventh thousand years the preparing of the way before the time of his coming."

The text of ch. 8-11 is paralleled by ch. 16 (16:1 has the same chronological start as 8:6). Both sets of text deal with similar events and focus on the same individual, the beast. However, the present set of text does not mention the beast as does ch. 16. Rather, this presentation is intended to emphasize divine judgement and vindication on behalf of the martyred saints, in response to the complaint of 6:10. Chapter 16 more explicitly identifies who it is that is being punished and why. The judgement theme is explicitly referenced in 16:5-7.

The present text draws heavily on the rhetoric and imagery employed by various Old Testament Prophets, while ch. 16 draws mainly on the Exodus account of the plagues cast out on Egypt (cf. Exod. 7:14-12:30). The combining of these two sets of imagery to describe the punishment poured out on the wicked is intended to emphasize how bad it will be.

The parallels between ch. 8-11 and 16 are as follows:

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| 1) Hail and fire, one third of the earth burned (8:7) | 1) Loathsome and malignant sore upon those who worship beast (16:2) |
| 2) Burning mountain cast into sea, sea becomes blood, one third of all sea life dies, ships decay (8:8-9) | 2) Sea turned to blood, all living things in sea die (16:3) |
| 3) Burning star falls and poisons third part of rivers (8:10-11) | 3) Rivers and springs turn to blood (16:4) |

4) Third part of sun, moon, stars darkened (8:12)

4) Sun scorches mankind with great heat (16:8-9)

5) Hell releases a terrible plague upon mankind (9:1-12) 6) A fearsome army kills one third of all men (9:13-21)

5) Painful sores upon those who worship beast (16:10-11) 6) Rivers dried up to allow invading armies to enter (16:12)

7) The Apocalypse of Christ (11:15-19)

7) Babylon thrown down (16:17-21)

The seven trumpets, or seven vials in ch. 16, are presented sequentially, but are to be taken as referring to the same event, the Day of Lord, rather than a discreet series of seven events. The parallel accounts of ch. 8-11 and ch. 16 correlate reasonably well, but there are obvious differences. Most notably the seeming contradiction of the fourth trumpet/vial. As such, it is unlikely the text is intended to be taken as a chronology of specific events culminating in the Second Advent of Christ.

Comments on Revelation 8

1 AND when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. 3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer [it] with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, [which came] with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.

v1-4 The seventh seal unfolds with John seeing a heavenly temple service. Seven angels are summoned and given seven trumpets, but they do not sound the trumpets yet (v. 2). Incense is burned at the altar which is before the throne of God (cf. 6:9). Profound silence reigns (v. 1) as all the inhabitants of heaven pray while the incense is burned (v. 3-4).

The incense burning temple ceremony is held symbolically to represent God's acknowledgment of the prayers of the martyred

saints (cf. 6:10). It serves to show why the divine judgement handed out upon the earth are so harsh, because the inhabitants of the earth hate the saints and love the beast (cf. ch. 16). Judgement was decided upon before the ceremony started, hence the giving of the trumpets in v. 2. The ceremony makes the reason for that judgement explicit, and is therefore somewhat legalistic, presenting the evidence before conviction and execution of punishment.

v1 Profound silence was observed during ancient Temple worship when incense offerings were made, cf. Luke 1:10. Incense offerings were symbolic of the prayers of the people rising up to heaven (cf. Ps. 141:2), so when the offerings were made those in attendance prayed fervently. Hence the silence.

Compare D&C 88:95 for a similar statement concerning the silence in heaven, as well as additional details concerning chronology.

"half an hour", i.e., a relatively short space of time, not intended to be taken literally.

v2 These seven angels are the same appearing in v. 6. They are given trumpets to sound, but wait until the end of the incense burning ceremony to sound them. The seven angels are summoned to execute judgement, but do not do so until the evidence is presented and the case is made against the wicked.

v3-5 The symbolism is antithetical, with the smoke from the incense ascending up to God while the coals from the incense are thrown down on the earth.

v3-4 The prayers of the saints and the incense from the heavenly throne intermingle. What are the saints praying for? See 6:9-10.

v3 "a golden censer", Adam Clarke in his commentary explains the symbolism of the censer being gold, as follows:

On other days it was the custom of the priest to take fire from the great altar in a silver censer, but on the day of expiation the high priest took the fire from the great altar in a golden censer; and when he was come down from the great altar, he took incense from one of the priests, who brought it to him, and

went with it to the golden altar; and while he offered the incense the people prayed without in silence

Thus, the gold censer was specifically associated with Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, and was symbolic of the expiation of sins.

5 And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast [it] into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake. 6 And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

7 The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

8 And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; 9 And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

10 And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; 11 And the name of the star is called wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

12 And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.

v5-12 Divine judgement is poured out upon the earth (v. 5). The judgement is presented as seven sets of curses similar to ones anciently visited upon the wicked (v. 6-12).

A number of the symbols used by John are rather obscure, and therefore difficult to discern the meaning of. Regardless of their obscurity, it is plain the general intent is to portray divine judgment upon the wicked of the earth. Various interpreters comment on the text based upon their particular views, whether it be historical or eschatological, physical or spiritual.

v5 The imagery is taken from Ezek. 10:2. The censer, or incense burner, loaded with fiery coals represents the Lord's wrath and judgements upon the wicked.

v6 After judgement has been decreed in v. 5, the punishment is meted out.

"seven", the number seven is a divine number, harking back to the days of creation, that there are seven angels with seven trumpets indicates the judgement is divine.

v7 Compare Exod. 9:23-24, D&C 87:6.

"hail", cp. 16:21.

"fire", probably referring to lightning, as in the OT lightning is commonly called "fire".

"blood", probably referring to suffering. John uses "blood" to figuratively represent suffering, cf. 17:6, 19:2.

v8 John paraphrases Jeremiah's poetical threats against Babylon, cf. Jer. 51:24-58, and cp. 16:19, 18:21. However, if one were to read this verse physically, John might be referring to volcanic activity, particularly given v. 12.

v9 "ships were destroyed", given the context it is probably connected to 18:17, and is therefore destruction as a result of decay rather than catastrophe.

v10 "burning as it were a lamp", a better translation would be "a torch" rather than "a lamp".

v11 "Wormwood", the Greek "apsinthos" transliterates to the English "absinth". The term describes something undrinkable, extremely unpleasant to the taste, bitter, or grievous.

v12 Smoke, dust, or some other particulate matter obscures all light over a major portion of the earth's surface, cp. 3 Ne. 8:20-22, which was probably a result of volcanic ash.

13 And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!

v13 "an angel flying", a better translation would be "an eagle flying", perhaps the same eagle as in 4:7 and 6:7.

"Woe, woe, woe", the superlative woe highlighting the three terrible last soundings of the angels.

"the trumpet of the three angels", the three remaining angels hold the last three woes referenced in 9:1, 9:13 and 11:15.

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